Withdrawal of Arthritis drug

882. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a major US drug company Merck and Company Inc. has withdrawn its Arthritis drug Vioxx from market after a study showed that it doubled the risk of heart attacks and strokes whereas the Indian pharma companies marketing the generic version of the same are undecided about the pulling out of the drugs, stating the US, FDA has not banned its use;

(b) whether the action of Merck intended to thwart the attempts of generic drug makers to undercut Merck, now that the patent protection on the same has expired; and

(c) the action proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) to (c) Consequent to the withdrawal of 'VIOXX' (a brand name of Rofecoxib) by M/s. Merck, USA, the overall safety of the drug has also been examined by an Expert Committee in the Directorate General of Health Services. It has been decided to discontinue the manufacturing and sale of Rofecoxib in India and Notification to this effect is being issued under the provisions of Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

Availability of life saving drugs

883. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Mimster of CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that due to heavy prices of drugs, charged by pharmaceutical companies in India, many people could not afford to purchase life saving drugs;

(b) if so, what steps have been taken or proposed to be taken by Government for ensuring the regular availability of life saving drugs at reasonable prices in the country;

(c) whether Government have undertaken any review of performance of public sector units set up for manufacturing of critical bulk drugs; and